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Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01
INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15
ICA-11 TRSE-00 AID-05 /081 W
----------029721 150735Z /13
R 141324Z APR 78
FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0932
INFO AMCONSUL BOMBAY
AMCONSUL CALCUTTA
AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
AMEMBASSY DACCA
AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
AMEMBASSY KABUL
AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMCONSUL MADRAS
AMEMBASSY TEHRAN
CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 NEW DELHI 5883

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, IN
SUBJECT: FACTIONALISM WITHIN THE JANATA PARTY

INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY: IN-FIGHTING AND FACTIONALISM HAVE BEEN CHRONIC PROBLEMS FOR THE JANATA AND HAVE ALWAYS BEEN A SOURCE OF CONCERN FOR ITS WELL-WISHERS. HOWEVER, IN RECENT WEEKS WE HAVE DETECTED EVEN GREATER CONCERN AND DISMAY AT THE RULING PARTY'S INABILITY TO SET ITS HOUSE IN ORDER OR TO COPE EFFECTIVELY WITH MRS. GANDHI'S GROWING CHALLENGE. IN OUR VIEW, THIS SENTIMENT HAS NOT YET REACHED THE STAGE OF ALARM.
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BUT WE DO FIND THAT MORE AND MORE OF OUR REGULAR CONTACTS ARE EXPRESSING PESSIMISM ABOUT THE LONG-TERM VIABILITY OF THE JANATA IF PRESENT TRENDS WITHIN IT CONTINUE. THERE IS A GROWING PERCEPTION -- EVEN AMONG JANATA MP'S -- THAT THE RULING PARTY HAS SQUANDERED A FULL YEAR IN POWER BECAUSE OF ITS DISSENSIONS AND HAS LOST THE OPPORTUNITY TO MAKE ITS OWN MARK UPON THE INDIAN POLITY. THE RECENT INTENSIFICATION OF FAC-

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TIONAL TROUBLES AT JANATA'S HIGHEST LEVELS HAS HIGHLIGHTED THIS CONCERN. JANATA ELDERS HAVE SOUGHT TO REMEDY THIS BY CONSTITUTING A "COMMITTEE OF THE BIG FIVE," BUT SUCH EXERCISES CAN ONLY PAPER OVER THE VERY REAL CRACKS WHICH DIVIDE THE PARTY. MRS. GANDHI'S GROWING CHALLENGE HAS LENT A NOTE OR URGENCY TO TRYING TO RESOLVE THESE CHRONIC DIVISIONS, AND THE NEED EFFECTIVELY TO MEET HER CHALLENGE IS MOST URGENT IN THE NORTHERN JANATA-RULED STATES WHERE SHE HAS CONCENTRATED HER ACTIVITIES. THE PRIME MINISTER IS EVIDENTLY CONCERNED ABOUT THIS WIDELY-FELT SENSE OF DISARRAY, AND HE MUST BE THE KEY FIGURE IN TURNING THE SITUATION AROUND. IT SEEMS CLEAR THAT THE PRESENT ATMOSPHERE IN WHICH THE GOI OPERATES IS NOT LIKELY TO ENCOURAGE BOLD, COURAGEOUS AND TIMELY POLICY DECISIONS. NOT IS IT ONE IN WHICH THE WORK OF GOVERNMENT IS LIKELY TO ENJOY CLEAR PRIORITY OVER ATTENTION TO POLITICAL MANEUVERS. END INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY.

1. A SQUANDRED YEAR: IT IS CLEAR THAT THE EUPHORIA WHICH ACCOMPANIED THE INSTALLATION OF THE JANATA GOVERNMENT AT THE CENTER DISSIPATED RAPIDLY LAST YEAR. WHAT WE FIND SIGNIFICANT AT THIS TIME IS THAT EVEN MANY JANATA MP'S WHO HAVE ALL ALONG SOUGHT TO EMPHASIZE THE POSITIVE ARE NOW BECOMING INCREASINGLY GLOOMY. WE DETECT A GROWING UNEASE IN JANATA RANKS AT THE APPARENT LACK OF DIRECTION IN PARTY AND GOVERNMENT. RULING PARTY MP'S CANDIDLY ADMIT THAT THE GOVERNMENT HAS DONE LITTLE TO IMPLEMENT ITS PLEDGES; THEY CONCEDE THAT IT HAS FAILED TO CONFIDENTIAL

FORMULATE COHERENT ECONOMIC POLICIES AND THAT APPEALS TO GIVE JANATA "MORE TIME" SOUND LIKE A WELL-WORN (AND IRRELEVANT) PHONOGRAPH RECORD. MUCH OF THE UNEASE CLEARLY CENTERS AROUND THE PARTY'S INABILITY TO SET ITS ORGANIZATIONAL HOUSE IN ORDER (SEE NEW DELHI A-72). THE ISSUE OF FINALIZING THE MEMBER-SHIP LISTS AND HOLDING ORGANIZATIONAL ELECTIONS SEEMS TO THEM AS DISTANT FROM RESOLUTION AS EVER. MORE THAN THIS, HOWEVER, THERE SEEMS TO BE A GROWING PERCEPTION -- EVEN AMONG JANATA MP'S -- THAT THE PARTY HAS SQUANDERED A FULL YEAR IN POWER WITH ITS DISSENSIONS AND IN THE PROCESS HAS MISSED -- SOME BELIEVE FOR GOOD -- ITS ONE CRUCIAL OPPORTUNITY TO MAKE ITS OWN DISTINCTIVE MARK UPON THE INDIAN POLITY.

2. THE BACK-BITING INTENSIFIES: THE RECENT INTENSIFICATION OF FACTIONAL TROUBLES AT JANATA'S HIGHEST LEVELS HAS PLAYED A KEY ROLE IN HIGHLIGHTING CONCERN OVER THE LACK OF DIRECTION WITHIN THE RULING PARTY. JANATA LEADERS HAVE RESORTED TO WHAT AMOUNTS TO OPEN ATTACKS ON EACH OTHER AS THEY SEEK TO MANEUVER INTO ADVANTAGEOUS POSITIONS. SOME OF THIS INTERNECINE WAR-FARE IS CONDUCTED THROUGH PROXIES: HEALTH MINISTER RAJ NARAIN, HOME MINISTER CHARAN SINGH'S LIEUTENANT, HAS OPENLY CRITICIZED PARTY PRESIDENT CHANDRA SHEKHAR FOR ORGANIZATIONAL

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AND STRATEGIC LAPSES. S.N. MISHRA'S ALLEGATIONS IN THE LOK

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EYCONSUL MADRAS 7860
AMEMBASSY TEHRAN
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 NEW DELHI 5883

CINCPAK FOR POLAD

SABHA OF PAYOFFS IN THE DPSA ACQUISITION ISSUE (SEE
NEW DELHI 5257) ARE SEEN AS AN ATTACK ON DEFENSE MINISTER
JAGJIVAN RAM INSPIRED BY CHARAN SINGH. THESE TWO

RIVALS, OUTRANKED IN SENIORITY ONLY BY DESAI, HAVE GONE
INCREASINGLY PUBLIC IN THEIR CONFLICT. AND THAT CONFLICT
HAS NOW COME TO TAKE ON UGLY AND DANGEROUS CASTE OVER-
TONES REFLECTING THE POLITICAL, SOCIAL, AND ECONOMIC
ANTIPATHY BETWEEN RAM'S HARIJANS AND THE LOWER/MIDDLE
CASTE FARMERS CHAMPIONED BY CHARAN SINGH. THE HOME
MINISTER'S RELATIONS WITH DESAI HAVE ALSO BECOME MORE
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STRAINED. IT IS WIDELY ACCEPTED THAT HE IS SEEKING TO DISCREDIT THE PM BY FOSTERING ALLEGATIONS AGAINST HIS SON KANTIBHAI (SEE NEW DELHI A-23).

3. "DINNER DIPLOMACY": BY LAST WEEK THESE RIFTS AT THE TOP HAD BECOME SOVISIBLE -- AND JANATA ATTEMPTS TO EXPLAIN THEM AWAY SO TRANSPARENT -- THAT MAJOR CORRECTIVE STEPS SEEMED NECESSARY. PARTY LEADERS CONSTITUTED A SPECIAL "COMMITTE OF THE BIG FIVE" TO SETTLE DISPUTES THROUGH PERSONAL PRIVATE DISCUSSIONS. COMPOSED OF THE PM, CHARAN SINGH, JAGJIVAN RAM, FOREIGN MINISTER VAJPAYEE AND CHANDRA SHEKHAR, THIS GROUP MET INFORMALLY AT MORARJI'S RESIDENCE FOR DINNER ON APRIL 5. HIGHLY BALLYHOOED, THE DINNER GATHERING WAS PRECEDED BY EQUALLY HIGHLY PUBLICIZED ROUNDS OF RECONCILIATION TALKS BETWEEN CHARAN SINGH AND RAM AND BETWEEN CHARAN SINGH AND CHANDRA SHEKHAR.

4. NO ONE WE HAVE TALKED TO SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN EMPRESSED BY THESE HIGH LEVEL HATCHET BURYING EXERCISES. REAL CRACKS OBVIOUSLY CONTINUE TO EXIST AND IT IS WIDELY PERCEIVED THAT MORE FUNDAMENTAL MEASURES WILL BE REQUIRED IF THEY ARE TO BE CONTAINED, LET ALONE RE-PAIRED. FOR THE DIFFERENCES INVOLVE MORE THAT THE CONFLICTING PERSONALITIES AND AMBITIONS OF THE LEADERS THEMSELVES, IMPORTANT AS THESE ASPECTS MAY BE. INDEED, THEY SPRING FROM THE NATURE OF THE PARTY ITSELF, STILL BASICALLY A COALITION OF DISPARATE PARTIES, ALL WITH THEIR OWN HISTORIES, LEADERS, RANK AND FILE, AND POLICY ORIENTATION.

5. MRS. GANDHI'S CHALLENGE: THE COINCIDENCE OF SEVERAL EVENTS -- THE SETBACK TO THE "SOUTHERN CONFIDENTIAL

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STRATEGY" IN FEBRUARY, THE NARROW WIN IN KARNAL AND THE PUBLIC RECRIMINATIONS OVER PLACING BLAME, PLUS GROWING POPULAR PERCEPTIONS OF A GOVERNMEFT AND RULING PARTY UNABLE TO COPE WITH MUD-SLINGING AT ITS HIGHEST RANKS -- HAS CONTRIBUTED TO THE CURRENT PESSIMISTIC ASSESSMENTS OF THE JANATA AND WHERE IT IS GOING. BUT THE DISMAY AND UNEASE WHICH WE ARE NOW DETECTING WOULD NOT HAVE REACHED CURRENT PRO-PORTIOY
WERE IT NOT FOR THE DETERMINED CHALLENGE WHICH MRS. GANDHI HAS POSED FOR THE PARTY. HER EMERGENCE AS "THE OPPOSITION" HAS THUS FAR EVOKED A CONFUSED RESPONSE FROM THE RULING PARTY. THE NEED

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EFFECTIVELY TO MEET HER CHALLENGE IS PERCEIVED TO
BE MOST URGENT IN THE NORTHERN STATES WHERE SHE HAS
NOW CONCENTRATED HER ACTIVITIES. JANATA MP'S
FRANKLY CONCEDE TO US THAT THE JANATA GOVERNMENTS IN
BIHAR AND UP ARE "DISASTROUS" AND ARE TOTALLY UNABLE
TO RUN AN EFFECTIVE ADMINISTRATION, MUCH LESS COPE WITH
THE "POLITICS OF THE STREETS" STRATEGY WHICH MRS. GANDHI
APPARENTLY INTENDS TO UNDERTAKE. THEY TELL US THAT IF
THE RULING PARTY IS TO HAVE ANY CHANCE OF TAKING ON
MRS. GANDHI ON HER OWN TERMS, THE JANATA LEADERSHIP
WILL HAVE TO ACT DECISIVELY AND CONDUCT A THOROUGH
HOUSE-CLEANING OF THE GOVERNMENTS IN UP AND BIHAR.
YET, THEY ALSO ACKNOWLEDGE THAT THE PARTY LEADERSHIP
MAY FEEL UNABLE TO REPLACE THE CHIEF MINISTERS IN THESE
TWO STATES BECAUSE SUCH A STEP MAY ONLY WIDEN THE
DIFFERENCES AMONG THE WARRRING FACTIONS IN THE STATES.
(AND BY IMPLICATION, PERHAPS AT THE CENTER AS WELL).

6. THE PRIME MINISTER IS EVIDENTLY CONCERNED ABOUT
THIS WIDELY FELT SENSE OF DISARRAY, AND IT IS CLEAR
THAT HE MUST BE THE KEY FIGURE IN TURNING THE SITUATION
AROUND. WHETHER HE WILL BE WILLING AND ABLE TO DO SO
IS UNCERTAIN. WHAT DOES SEEM CLEAR, AND THIS HAS AN
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IMPORTANT BEARING ON US INTERESTS, IS THAT THE PRESENT
ATMOSPHERE IN WHICH THE GOI OPERATES IS NOT ONE LIKELY
TO ENCOURAGE BOLD, COURAGEOUS, AND TIMELY POLICY
DECISIONS. NOR IS IT ONE IN WHICH THE WORK OF GOVERNMENT
IS LIKELY TO ENJOY CLEAR PRIORITY OVER ATTENTION TO
POLITICAL MANEUVERS.

7. WE WILL BE HAVING MORE TO SAY ABOUT THIS IN A
COMPREHENSIVE REPORT WE'LL BE SUBMITTING WITH CONTRIBUTIONS
FROM THE CONGENS EARLY NEXT MONTH. WE ARE TIMING THIS SO
THAT IT CAN BE OF MAXIMUM BENEFIT IN THE PREPARATIONS
FOR THE PM'S JUNE 12-14 VISIT TO WASHINGTON.
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